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THE THEBAN LEGION OF ST. MAURICE

BY

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One of the most prominent legends of the early Christian Church is that of a legion including Christians in the Roman army recruited in the Thebaid, southern Egypt, led by Maurice and martyred at Acaunus, the modern St. Maurice-en-Valais in the western Alps, about 286 A.D.[1] Within the past century, lacking concrete evidence from unbiased sources that the legend was factual, historians and churchmen alike have slighted it. This paper will attempt to provide that long missing evidence.

The Theban Legion deserves attention. The story reveals details of Diocletian's fateful army reforms. It is interesting as an adventure epic involving a multitude of men and momentous events across thousands of miles of voyage and marches. And it sheds light upon aspects of the early church significant to both liberal and conservative Christians today, issues affecting everyone. For the moral issue of the use of organized violence deals with dangers threatening to extinguish mankind or reduce us to savagery. The Theban legionnaires suffered martyrdom for refusing to carry out military orders they held unconscionable. No wonder that Hugo Grotius used its example to condemn atrocities committed under military orders.[2] The harsh truth is that some of the worst atrocities in history have been committed by normally decent men nevertheless blindly obedient to military commands. The Thebans were soldiers, volunteers who refused to desert, yet rejected an immoral military obedience even as they refused to use violence to defend themselves against their slayers. Indeed their action brings liberal and conservative within the church onto

[1] Eucherius, Bishop of Lyons, *Codex Parisiensis*, Bibliothèque Nationale, No. 9550. In L. Dupraz, *Les Passions de St. Maurice d'Agaune* (Fribourg 1961) Appendice I. Also B. Krusch (Ed.), *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, III: *Scriptores rerum merovingicarum* (Berlin 1896) 32–41.

[2] H. Grotius, *De Jure Belli*, I, 2: 14–16.

common ground, for they were in a sense both pacifists and well disciplined military.

The Thebans did not seek martyrdom but the action of their martyrs enabled most of the legionnaires to escape to serve again, as shall be demonstrated. Their actions expressed an extraordinary discipline above and beyond that required by any army. Their persecutors a few years later would admit the military soundness of their refusal to carry out orders detrimental to the interest of the empire and would award the Theban survivors with positions of military honor and trust as bodyguards of the highest imperial commanders in the Roman Empire.

The evidence to be presented is essentially fourfold. First the military papyrus requisitioning supplies for a troop of legionary size embarking overseas from southern Egypt at precisely the time that the Theban Legion must have embarked if its legend is true. Second, coins of Alexandria of a type issued only when troops for a new legion were leaving that port, coinciding precisely in time with the papyrus. Third, the evidence of the Roman army list, the *Notitia Dignitatum.* Fourth, a passage from the account of the martyr Maximilian which upon analysis reveals the presence of Theban Christian legionnaires in units coinciding with the evidence of the *Notitia.*

The papyrus found at Panopolis on the Nile just north of the Thebaid district consists of a receipt for delivery and an auditor's note matching requisition and receipt.[3] The latter is dated "in the sixth year of our Lord the Emperor Caesar Marcus Aurelius Probus Pius Augustus, Tubi sixteenth", i.e. January 13, 282. The delivery totalled "38,496 modii of bread" to be delivered at Panopolis to "the mobilized soldiers and sailors".

The most recent and conservative estimate is that the modius was about nine litres or a peck, a quarter of a bushel.[4] If a bushel of sixty pounds, 36 litres, is used as standard, the bread weighed 577,440 pounds. A person relying exclusively on grain for nourishment needs one-half to two-thirds of a kilogram daily or approximately 1.5 pounds if the latter is taken as the normal ration.[5] This divided into the delivery weight yields 384,960 daily rations. A legion prior to Diocletian's army reforms was composed

[3] A. S. Hunt and C. C. Edgar, *Select Papyri* (London 1956) II, 581–583, No. 426.

[4] A. H. M. Jones, *Decline of the Ancient World* (London 1966) Appendix III, 376 (*DAW*).

[5] C. Clark, *Starvation or plenty?* (New York 1970) 19.

of 5000 to 6000 men. The rations would have sustained a force this large for about three months.

There is no mention in the papyrus of a legion or legionaries. Native Egyptians in Egypt were strictly forbidden to serve in the legions, but could enlist as auxiliary troops and later enter a legion.[6] The area south of the Nile delta before Diocletian was garrisoned by auxiliary *cohors* and *alae* and at times by detachments of Egypt's only legion, *II Traiana.*[7] The soldiers cited in the papyrus were therefore auxiliaries for the most part, but in numerical strength a legion. The sailors shared the soldiers' rations and are likewise described as "mobilized" suggesting that perhaps they were being transferred to the army.

Normally troops were issued grain bought at a price fixed by the government but the papyrus indicates requisition of crops as a tax without payment. Bread or biscuit was the ration of troops embarking overseas or venturing on long marches.[8] The date accords with organization of Probus' campaign against Persia continued by Carus, his successor as emperor.

In another paper it is demonstrated that in more than a dozen cities of the Roman Middle East for three centuries coins bearing an eagle flanked by cloth banners, *vexilla*, always were issued coincidental with the creation of new legions,[9] and on no other occasions. Here only Alexandria's shall be cited.

An eagle flanked by banners is depicted on Alexandrian coins of the reigns of Marcus Aurelius,[10] Commodus,[11] Septimius Severus[12] and Aurelian,[13] and on not other occasions before 282. These coins correspond precisely in dates of issue with the raising of troops respectively to create

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[6] Hunt, *Ibid.*, 40–51. Even if receiving honorable discharge after illegally serving 24 years in a legion, an Egyptian was refused Roman citizenship, at least within Egypt.

[7] L. Lesquier, *Le Recrutement de l'Armée Romaine d'Egypte au I et II siècle* (Paris 1904) 31. By the third century auxiliaries were allowed citizenship while in service in Egypt. Roman citizenship was hereditary. R. Cagnat, *L'Armée Romaine d'Afrique* (Paris 1892) 733.

[8] A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire* (Oxford 1964) II, 628 (*LRE*).

[9] D. O'Reilly, Eagle Between Banners on Roman Coinage, *Journal of the Society for Ancient Numismatics* 8 (Los Angeles 1976).

[10] G. Dattari, *Nummi Augg. Alexandrini* (Cairo 1901): 3415, 3416, 3695, 3696. J. G. Milne, *Catalogue of Alexandrian Coins* (Oxford 1971): 2535, 2536, 2537. R.S. Poole, *Catalogue of the Coins of Alexandria and the Nomes* (Bologna 1964): 1277.

[11] Milne, *Ibid.*: 2703; Poole, *Ibid.*: 1437. H. Mattingly, *Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum* (London 1940) IV: 1438 (*RIC*).

[12] Dattari, *Ibid.*: 4008.

[13] Milne, *Ibid.*: 4391–97; Poole, *Ibid.*: 2369–73.

the new legions *I* and *III Italica*,[14] the *nova classis Libica*,[15] *I*, *II* and *III Parthica*,[16] and *I Illyricorum*[17] and *IV Martia*.[18] Their symbolism thus represents detachments being sent from Alexandria to aid in the creation of new legions, or in Commodus' case a grain fleet. None of the above coin issues were large, nor do they identify a specific legion.

Coins of this type are however among the most common issued in Alexandria in 282–285 during the reigns of the Emperor Carus and his sons, Numerianus and Carinus.[19] No new legion dating from this period is known unless the monastic account of a Theban Legion of Christian troops martyred in the Alps in 286 is accepted.

Greek hagiography states that Zabdas, a bishop of Jerusalem mentioned by Eusebius, baptized the Theban legionnaires.[20] Bishops were forbidden to exercise jurisduction outside their dioceses. That new units from southern Egypt would be sent to Jerusalem during war against Persia is reasonable. A new legion would not have been put directly into a combat zone but would have been sent to replace an experienced unit moved to the front.

Voltaire doubted that any Theban Legion ever existed.[21] The *Notitia Dignitatum*, the Roman army list, records four and implies a fifth *legio Thebeorum* plus a *Thebei Palatini*,[22] the only force of eastern origin in the West after Constantine. It apparently replaced the *Praetoriani* he had disbanded, a uniquely privileged status in accord with the thesis of this paper. But it is the earlier Theban Legions that are our concern.

These are the only units in the *Notitia* to bear the names of the tetrarchy of four rulers created by Diocletian in 293. They were created as a series

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[14] E. Ritterling, art. Legio, in: Pauly–Wissowa–Kroll, *Real-Encyklopädie der Klassischen Altertumwissenschaft*, XII, 1300–1. H. M. D. Parker and B. H. Warmington, *History of the Roman World* (London 1969) VII, 20.

[15] Dessau, *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*, 119. Schwendermann, *Der Historische Wert der Vita Marci* (Heidelberg 1923) 90:2. A. von Premerstein, *Klio* 12 (1912) 139–78. In Parker, *Ibid.*, 24.

[16] Ritterling, *Ibid.*: 1435, 1476, 1539. Parker, *Ibid.*, 69. H. M. D. Parker, *The Roman Legions* (London 1971) 100.

[17] Ritterling, *Ibid.*: 1346, and Ritterling, *Festschrift für O.Hirschfeld* (Berlin 1903) 345–9. Parker, *History*, 210.

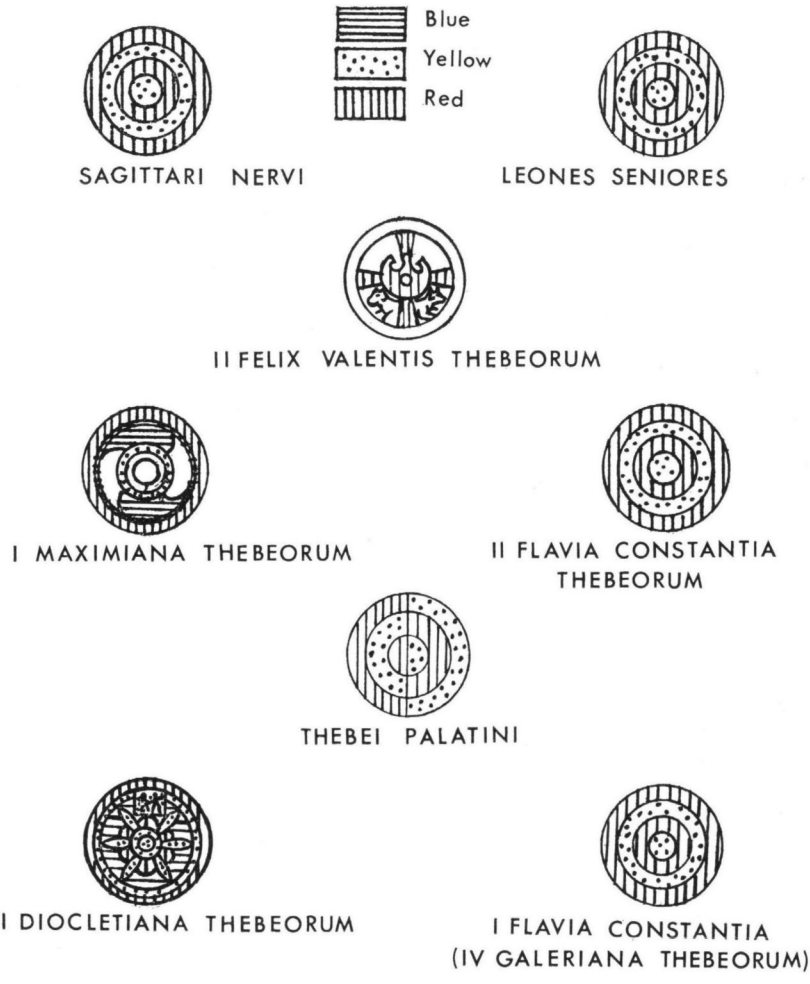
[18] Ritterling, art. Legio, 1346 and *Festschrift*, 345–9. Parker, *Ibid.*, 210.

[19] Dattari, *Ibid.*: 5567–68, 5578–79, 5592–97, 5604–05, 5616–17. Milne, *Ibid.*: 4674–82, 4690–96, 4710–12, 4728–30. Poole, *Ibid.*: 2442–44, 2448–60, 2462–63, 2471–73.

[20] Gratian, *Concordia Discordantium Canonum*, I.IV.7.10ff.

[21] Voltaire, *Essais sur les Moeurs et l'Esprit des Nations*, 1,5; 9.

[22] O. Seeck (Ed.), *Notitia Dignitatum* (Berlin 1876, repr. Frankfurt 1962) *Praefatio* XXIV, 26.



to be the bodyguard units of the tetrarchy, judging not only by their names but their direct sequence in the *Notitia* and their title numbers. They are *I Maximiana Thebeorum*,[23] *II Flavia Constantia Thebeorum*,[24] *III Diocletiana Thebeorum*[25] and *I Flavia Constantia*,[26] representing Maximianus Herculius who ordered the martyrdom of the Christian

[23] *Ibid.*, *Or.* VIII, 36.
[24] *Ibid.*, *Or.* VII, 10= 45; *Or.* XXXI, 32.
[25] *Ibid.*, *Or.* VIII, 37.
[26] *Ibid.*, *Or.* VII, 9= 44.

Theban troops according to monastic accounts, Constantius Chlorus, the father of Constantine, Diocletian and Galerius. One would expect that *I Flavia Constantia* would be titled *IV Galeria Thebeorum*, but Nischer has pointed out that while no units in the *Notitia* bear Galerius' name, some probably had but were renamed.[27] Galerius was a defeated rival expunged from the army list presumably by Constantine; the other tetrarchs being his claims to the throne and Maximianus grandfather of his heirs. Thus *I Flavia Constantia* seems originally the *IV Galeria Thebeorum*, renamed by Constantine. The *I Flavia Constantia* and *II Flavia Constantia Thebeorum* are listed serving in the Thebaid in the late fourth century and have the same shield design, indicating their common origin.

One of the strongest arguments against the veracity of the legend of the Theban Legion is that Roman authorities would be exceedingly unlikely to execute an entire legion for insubordination. But what if the legendary unit was not annihilated but reorganized? The monastic accounts differ as to the number of men in the Theban Legion, but all cite it composed of at least 6000 men.[28] None state that all were executed. Otto of Freising, writing in the eleventh century, perhaps with evidence not available to us, states that most of the Theban legionnaires escaped while the martyrs offered what was in effect a rearguard action.[29]

Diocletian in reorganizing the army, created many new style legions each of some 1000 men, as compared to the older units nominally about 6000 men in strength.[30] Some new style legions were created from old legions reorganized.[31] The Theban Legion of legend may well have been similarly reorganized.

That this occurred can be seen by analysis of the *Acta* of the martyr Maximilian, executed in North Africa in 295 for refusing Diocletian's newly established military conscription.[32] These *Acta* are generally

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[27] Seeck, *Ibid.*, *Oc.* V, 11 = 154 and *Oc.* VII, 29. E. C. Nischer, The Army Reforms of Diocletian and Constantine, *Journal of Roman Studies* 13 (1923) 21–23 and 29–30. H. M. D. Parker, The Legions of Diocletian, *Journal of Roman Studies* 23 (1933) 179. Parker holds that the field army in part originated under Diocletian; Nischer regards it as no earlier than Constantine's reign.

[28] Eucherius, *Ibid.* In Dupraz, Appendice I, A1,3 cites 6600. Interpolation C, Explicit cites 6585. Appendice II, Folio 204, end column, cites 6666. Appendice III, Folio 367 cites 6660. Jones, *DAW*, 18.

[29] Otto of Freising, *The Two Cities*, transl. C. C. Mierow (N.Y. 1928) III, 43.

[30] Jones, *DAW*, 216–17 and *LRE*, I, 56.

[31] Jones, *LRE*, III, 356. Thus *III Augusta*, formerly the only legion in Africa became the six new style units *Oc.* V,249–254, *Oc.* VII,146–151.

[32] H. Musurillo, *Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (N.Y. 1972) 247.

accepted as an authentic excerpt from the official trial record. Its moral issue is surely still with us. Maximilian cast away his military identification tag or seal.

> "I will not accept the seal," he replied. "I already have the seal of Christ who is my God."

The judge, attempting to reasonably dissuade the youth, makes a strong point in rebuttal.

> "The proconsul Dion said: 'In the sacred bodyguard of our Lords Diocletian and Maximian, Constantius and Maximus [Galerius], there are soldiers who are Christians, and they serve.'
>
> Maximilian replied: 'They know what is best for them. But I am a Christian and can do no wrong.'"

The bodyguards of the tetrarchy thus did contain Christians; in fact they are the only army units mentioned by the proconsul as containing Christians. These bodyguard units by their *Thebeorum* titles were recruited in the Thebaid. Each contained about 1000 men. They could be parts of the old style legion of Christian legend reorganized.

The seeming schism in Christian thought as regarded military service revealed in Maximilian's *Acta* can be clarified by the emphasis he places on his "seal" as a Christian, presumably his baptism. Maurice, Commander of the Theban Legion, is described as stating that he and others of his men have taken a Christian oath which the pagan oath demanded of them would violate.[33] What good an oath violating an oath? he asks. This prior oath was again, in all likelihood, that of baptism. That all soldiers of Christian sympathies on active duty in the army at the time were allowed baptism by the church is quite doubtful. Maximilian was conscripted, Maurice was probably a retired veteran on recall.

But why would pagan military authorities, including Maximianus Herculius, persecutor of the Theban Legion, have made its survivors their bodyguards? The answer is simple. In the previous half century, most emperors had been murdered by their troops. The Theban martyrs had refused to shed the blood of their persecutors even in self defense. They were the most reliable imperial bodyguards available.

The Theban Legion of St. Maurice must have still been in a formative stage when he was martyred, as he was its commander, a *primicerius*,[34]

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[33] Eucherius, *Ibid.*, in: Dupraz, Appendice I, A1, 9.

[34] Manuscript 256(461) of Einsiedeln Convent, Folio 374, in: Dupraz, Appendice III.

i.e. senior officer. His duty was *campiductor*,[35] that of a recalled veteran assigned as training officer. Normally a legion was commanded by a *praefectus castrorum* or *primipilus*.

Professor Van Berchem states that the legend of the Theban Legion perhaps, although there is no evidence to prove it, originated with the transference to the Alps of the cult of Maurice the Tribune martyred with some seventy other soldiers at Apameia, Syria, on the occasion of Galerius passing through that town.[36] This was presumably during his campaign against Persia in 296–97. At the time of the martyrdom of Maximilian in 295, Galerius was on the Danube, within a few days travel from Gaul.[37] Thus *I Flavia Constantia* (*IV Galeriana Thebeorum*) could have been the unit at Apameia, including survivors of the original Theban Legion suffering in the Alps. The commander of a unit the size of the tetrarch's bodyguard would have been a tribune in that era.[38]

The *Acta Maximiliani* reveals that the bodyguards of the tetrarchy in 295 were *comitati*, infantry field forces.[39] By 298, however, the bodyguards, according to the *Acta Sergi et Bacchi*,[40] martyred officers of Galerius' *Schola Gentilium*, were cavalry. That cavalry were more suitable for the campaign against Persia in 296–97 is understandable but was there another motive as well for the change which might explain the *IV Galeria Thebeorum* missing from the *Notitia*?

The Coptic account of the Christian involvement with the campaign of 296–97 has long been regarded with suspicion, most of the martyrs cited being unknown in Latin and Greek accounts. The so-called cycle of Basilides,[41] the civilian official held to be kinsman or friend of most of these martyrs may conflate separately authentic accounts into an historical romance, yet it contains no tales of the miraculous but on the contrary emphasizes definite political events otherwise not recorded. Its descriptions of political intrigues, military insubordination and a Christian

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[35] Eucherius, *Ibid.*, A1, 8. Jones, *LRE*, II, 640. Venantius Fortunatus, *Carm.* 2,14,5, M.G.H, AA, IV,I (1881) p. 42–43. The latter calls Maurice a *ductor*.

[36] D. Van Berchem, *Le Martyre de la Légion Thébaine* (Bale 1956) 42–43.

[37] Scriptores Historiae Augustae, *Vita Cari* 7,1; Aurelius Victor, *De Caesaribus* 38,2; Zonaras, 12,30, III p. 156. In Parker, 232.

[38] M. Rostovtzeff, *Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire* (N.Y. 1957) I, 511. Jones, *LRE*, II, 640.

[39] *Ibid.*, Musurillo, 246, L 21.

[40] E. Moore, *Some Soldier Martyrs of the Early Christian Church in East Jordan and Syria* (Beirut 1964) 7. *Analecta Bollandiana* 14 (Bruxelles 1895) 375ff. The latter series lists all saints by their date on the liturgical calendar.

[41] D. O'Leary, *The Saints of Egypt* (N.Y.C. 1937) 101–03.

international political policy independent of both the Roman and Persian empires, if true, would give motive to pious Christian writers to suppress it, after Constantine's triumph, each from his own bias. Lactantius, like many western Christians of the era, was a pacifist against Christians serving in the army while Eusebius and Sozomen were imperial apologists omitting data unfavorable to the regime or Christian support for it.

The story is that after a successful Persian campaign, Diocletian and Maximian (Galerius) returned to Antioch with hostages. This could only have been in 297 as Diocletian entered Egypt later that year. It was discovered that some of the emperor's most trusted officers were allowing Christianity to be taught openly to their troops. A Persian prince, Nicomedes, held hostage at the home of the patriarch of Antioch, escaped.[42] Another hostage, the general Banikarous, had been baptized.[43]

Diocletian demanded that his officers worship the idols. Claudius called Stratelates or the general,[44] Justus,[45] Leontius the Syrian,[46] Theodore the Oriental[47] and Anatole the Persian[48] refused. Anatole, a man with high ranking relatives in the Persian Empire, had been fifteen years in the Roman army – in other words he entered in 282, the year Probus had mobilized the troops of the Thebaid.

In reaction, the troops of Leontius and Theodore, on the River Atoush near Lake Van in the satellite realm of Armenia, baptized themselves by the hundreds.[49] They rejected Diocletian's order to evacuate Armenia in keeping with his treaty with Shapur, apparently fearing to abandon Christian Armenians to Persian persecution. Christianity was illegal in the Roman Empire, but the troops on the Atoush were not, strictly speaking, within the Empire.

At this point Diocletian was readily convinced that Armenian nationalists and Christians were conspiring against him. He ordered many of the men of Leontius and those of Andrew the Tribune[50] retired, meanwhile

[42] *Ibid.*, 111. The *Acta* of Hesychius (Mar. 10, Nov. 18) and Theotecnus (Oct. 10) reveal the presence of Galerius at Antioch in 297.

[43] *Ibid.*, 264.

[44] *Ibid.*, 111 (June 5).

[45] *Ibid.*, 175 (Feb. 4).

[46] *Ibid.*, 178 (Dec. 27).

[47] *Ibid.*, 264 (Jan. 7).

[48] *Ibid.*, 74 (Jan. 4).

[49] *Ibid.*, 264.

[50] Moore, *Ibid.*, 8. I.P. Migne, *Patrologiae Cursus Completus*, series graeca, 115, 596–609. The Greek *Acta* of Andrew (Aug. 19) states that he died with 2593 comrades

secretly advising Galerius to kill them when they were disarmed on Roman soil.[51] Himes and Philkiades,[52] martyrs of the Armenian church, kinsmen of some of these executed Christian soldiers, in revenge pulled Diocletian from his horse.

Embarking for Egypt, the emperor took Claudius and Justus and their families with him as prisoners. The Egyptian soldier Hor and his brother Bhai,[53] "having left Antioch", were martyred at this time in Alexandria under Diocletian, as was John,[54] a soldier "of the emperor's cohort", sent from Antioch. Could this cohort, probably a *cohors milliaria* of 1000 men, have been originally *Legio IV Galeria Thebeorum*? Papyri evidences *III Diocletiana Thebeorum* in Egypt north of the Thebaid as early as 300.[55] Presumably some of these troops had accompanied Diocletian from Antioch.

In the West martyrs regarded as associates of the Theban Legion are venerated from Bergamo, Italy, to Xanten on the lower Rhine. Among those are Gereon and his fifty comrades at Cologne[56] who, according to the story of Gregory the Moor[57] and his comrades, died at the orders of Maximian Herculius a few days before Gregory returned from the successful seizure of Boulogne from Carausius in 293. Others were soldiers at Milan, Maximian's later capital.[58] The centurion Alexander of Bergamo[59] died attempting to warn Christians of an impending persecution, probably in 296, the year of the only persecution known in Italy under Maximian, the year he marched from Milan to the Danube to replace Galerius, transferred to the Persian campaign. Many of the soldiers above are described as Moors who arrived in Europe after the Theban Legion was martyred in the Alps in 286. This accords well with the withdrawal of

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in the Taurus mountains of Cilicia, two months before Sergius and Bacchus were killed. Coptic hagiography honors 2000 troops at Antioch led by Fasilidas (Aug. 4) and 900 led by Anderuna and Tobias (July 9, 12, 14.) Apparently these are repeats of Basilidas and Andrew. It is not clear if all these troops were executed or some simply discharged.

51 Moore, *Ibid.*

52 T.Ruinart, *Acta Primorum Martyrum* (Paris 1739) S.S. Aug. IV. 419–421. (Aug. 14). They are cited with their kin Bassus, Eusebius, Eutyches and Basilidas.

53 O'Leary, *Ibid.*, 155 (June 23).

54 *Ibid.*, 119 (Jan. 3).

55 *Papyri Beatty Panopolis* 2, in: Jones, *LRE*, III, 187–88.

56 Gregory of Tours, *In Gloria Martyrum* 74–75, MGH, S.S. rer. mer. I, p. 484–561.

57 *Aanalecta*, Oct. 15, 22; June 25.

58 *Ibid.*, Victor and Maurus, May 8. Nabor and Felix, July 12. Ambrose, Aug. 16. Gusmaeus and Mattheus, Sept. 11. Fidelis and Carpophorus, Oct. 28.

59 *Ibid.*, Aug. 26.

Roman forces from all Mauretania Tingitania except the region near the Straits in 284, a withdrawal of which the abundant but only evidence are archaeological finds at Volubilis.[60] The involvement with Maximinian of the Moorish martyrs cited above suggests that most served in *I Maximiana Thebeorum*. It would be pointless to call them Thebans unless they served in a *Thebeorum* unit, perhaps originating in the old style legion martyred at Acaunus.

Only four legions in the *Notitia* share the same shield design, the *I Flavia Constantia, II Constantia Thebeorum, Sagittari Nervi*[61] and *Leones Seniores*.[62] The latter two appear in direct sequence located in Gaul, presumably organized about the same year and related. Their shield is a yellow disc surrounded by a red, a yellow and another red ring. The only colors decorating the eleventh century chapel of St. Maurice at Acaunus discovered by archaeologists in 1948 are red and yellow.[63]

The Nervi were a Belgic tribe. Nervi units are known from the *Notitia* to have garrisoned the Roman coastal fortresses near modern Douai and across the channel in Britain, links in the so-called Saxon Shore defenses.[64] Spanish units, in particular ones from Asturias near Leon, were also garrisons of these defenses in Britain.[65] Roman army units were named for places, persons, divinities or virtues; none bear the name of an animal unless it is the *Leones Seniores*. More likely the unit honors Leon, Spain, headquarters of *Legio VII Claudia Gemina Felix*, which had a detachment in Gaul in 286 judging by Carausius' coins honoring it.[66] Carausius also cited in coinage the Egyptian *Legio II Traiana*.[67] The *Acta* of the centurion Marcellus martyred in Mauretania Tingitania in 296[68] states that he was in *VII Claudia Gemina Felix*, serving under Anastasius Fortunatus, known from other sources as commander of *II Traiana* in Mauretania Tingitania under Diocletian. Spain has very few known Roman military martyrs, but these include four sons of the above

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60 R. Etienne, *Le Quartier Nord-Est de Volubilis* (Paris 1960). R. Thouvenot, *Volubilis* (Rabat 1949).

61 *Notitia, Praefatio*, XXIV, 26.

62 *Ibid., Oc.* V, 26= 171. *Oc.* VII, 65.

63 L. Blondel, *Les Anciennes Basiliques d'Agaune*, in: *Vallesia, Sion* VI (1951) 9.

64 *Notitia, Oc.* XXXVIII, 3 and *Oc.* XL, 23 and 53.

65 *Ibid., Oc.* XL, 35, 38, 42, 49. By the late fourth century, when the *Notitia* was written, the *Sagittari Nervi* and *Leones Seniores* were crack field units, not garrison troops.

66 *RIC*, Carausius, 75.

67 *Ibid.*, 78 and 79.

68 Musurillo, *Ibid.*, 251, Note 1; 253, Note 12.

Marcellus. Two having demolished[69] pagan idols at Leon were executed enroute to Tangiers, Servandus and Germanus. Two others died at Calahorra, Hemeterius and Chelidonius. Thus there were Christian troops in *VII Claudia Gemina Felix*, and plausibly some were in Gaul in 286 under Carausius.

Belgium, like Spain, has very few known Roman military martyrs. Almost all were killed at Douai, led by Terentianus.[70] No details are recorded, but Douai was not normally a Roman military station although it would have been of vital strategic importance to Carausius in his bid to rule Gaul in opposition to Maximian Herculius.

But what was the most likely intended duty station of the Theban Legion? It was the network of fortresses created on the channel against Saxon and Frisian searaiders, the Saxon Shore defenses first utilized by Carausius.[71] These defenses had complements equivalent to an old style legion of six thousand men on each side of the channel. This would have required units new in the West; its old units, hardpressed, could ill afford to deploy or detach more troops.

Orosius states that Maximian Herculius was made *augustus* as a direct response to Carausius' seizure of power in Gaul.[72] Understandably therefore, if part of the Theban Legion was already under Carausius' command as well as other Egyptian troops in Gaul, Maximian Herculius had a strong motive to halt any further march of Theban troops into Carausius' territory in addition to his animosity towards Christians.

All the monastic accounts describe the martyred Theban Legion as numbering at least 6000 men, the size of an old style legion before Diocletian's creation of the new legions of about 1000 men each. The four *Thebeorum* bodyguards units of the tetrarchs plus the *Sagittarii Nervi* and *Leones Seniores* amount to the numerical strength of an old style legion. The latter two and *II Flavia Constantia Thebeorum* and *I Flavia Con-*

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[69] *Analecta*, Mar. 3 and Aug, 30, 31. Oct. 23. Both Gregory of Tours, *Ibid.*, and another sixth century author, Venantius Fortunatus, *Carm.* 8,3,172, p. 185, and *Carm.* 2,14,5, p. 42–43 refer to the *felix* Theban Legion. Perhaps this was poetic usage, but two legions (and only two) did have a Felix title, *III Gallica Felix* at Beirut, which retired its veterans to Jerusalem, and *VII Claudia Gemina Felix*.

[70] J. E. Stadler, *Heiligen-Lexikon* (Augsburg 1862) April 10. Presumably this was in 293 with Carausius' loss of his continental holdings.

[71] D. A. White, *Litus Saxonicum* (Madison 1961) 30, 41–44, 63. S. Johnson, *The Roman Forts of the Saxon Shore* (London 1976) 112–113. Johnson holds Probus initiator of these defenses, aptly fitting the theory here presented, as the Theban troops of the papyrus cited above mobilized under Probus.

[72] Orosius, *Against the Pagans* VII, 25.

stantia (*IV Galeriana Thebeorum*) are the only four units with the same shield in the *Notitia*. The misinterpretation of the ambiguous monastic accounts to the effect that an entire old style legion were regarded as massacred can thus be understood in the disciplinary executions of some officers and men of an old style legion still being formed, later reorganized into new style legions. Presumably the troops disciplined were essentially of *I Maximiana Thebeorum* and *III Diocletiana Thebeorum*, considering that their shields differ from the identical design of the four above. That two units of one thousand men each suffered is also suggested by the shield design of Constantine's elite *Thebei Palatini*,[73] the only eastern unit in the West after his reign, and the only unit in the *Notitia* with an assymetrical shield. As we might expect from the thesis presented, its colors were red and yellow. It may have combined veterans of the two units suffering at Acaunus.

If only one of the proofs above, papyri, coins, analysis of the *Notitia* and the Acts of Maximilian et. al. can be accepted, nevertheless long sought evidence to verify the legend of the Theban Legion has been demonstrated. Each proof can stand by itself. Yet they obviously reinforce one another.

In a later article epigraphic and other evidence of the Theban Legion will be presented.

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[73] *Ibid.*